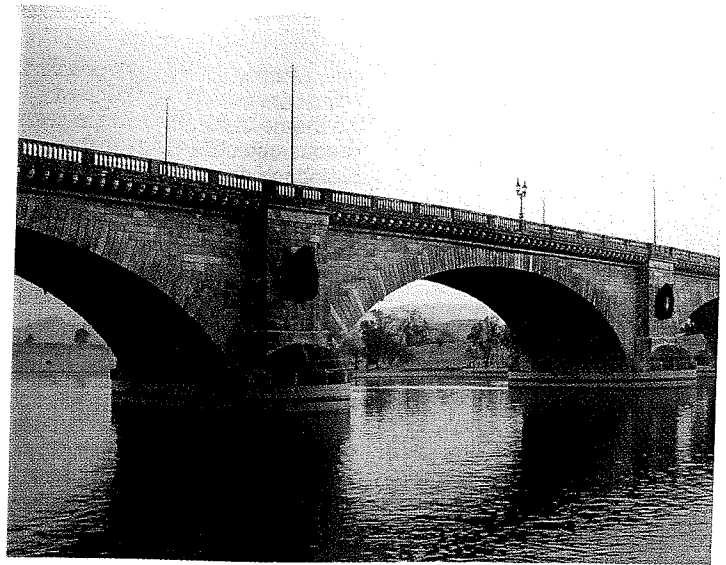


Art in America

October 2004



Andrea Robbins and Max Becher: *London Bridge, Lake Havasu, Arizona, 1993*, from the series "Where Do You Think You Are?"; inkjet print, 30 by 34 1/2 inches; at Sonnabend.

Andrea Robbins and Max Becher at Sonnabend

That the famed London Bridge is now a favorite spring-break party spot in Lake Havasu, Ariz., is one of several incongruities Andrea Robbins and Max Becher tackle in their series of 14 color photographs "Where Do You Think You Are?". Their deadpan image of the bridge, which was shipped piecemeal and reconstructed, in the 1960s, over an artificial reservoir the approximate width of the Thames, resembles the tourist representations that draw crowds to Lake Havasu and its gimmicky "English Village" surroundings. The artists have traveled worldwide to document what they term "transported places." They take photographs of various spots that mimic other, distant locales. Their shrewd selections and seemingly guileless presentation (medium-format photos, dating from 1991 to 2004, accompanied by brief factual descriptions) further estrange the already idiosyncratic sites.

The tendency to imitate, replicate or relocate memorable places can go to absurd lengths,

as demonstrated in Robbins and Becher's photograph of the full-scale replica of Stonehenge in Washington State. Constructed as if fresh from the Druids' time, the unweathered perfection of the stateside monument presumes to improve a key artifact of a pre-Christian civilization.

In *Shell Gas and Burger King, La Romana, Dominican Republic* (what Robbins and Becher call a "typical corporate pairing"), the emblems of U.S. economic power are so pervasive as to destabilize any local authenticity. In this photograph of a Dominican highway, signs of place are reduced to their most ephemeral; the bright, tropical light and the photograph's caption alone provide cues to the Caribbean setting. Another series on view further explored the proliferation of corporate logos. "America in France: Strip Malls of Toulouse" (2003) consists of nine images of corrugated-metal shopping centers in the French city. Brightly colored, highly legible signs thinly disguise the bunkerlike menace of the buildings.

The 13 photos in a complementary project, "France in America" (also 2003), were shot against the uniform gray skies of two small islands, St. Pierre and Miquelon, France's remaining colonial holdings off the coast of Newfoundland. Civic ordinances, enacted to maintain the quaint fishing-village character of the islands, have ossified the already depopulated provincial towns into schmaltzy destinations for continental French who are nostalgic for working-class harbor communities. Ultimately, it seems less lit-

erally about transposition than about the conception of place as always hybrid that motivates Robbins and Becher's projects.

—Eva Diaz